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SUBJECT Commentary: John Chancellor on Nicaragua

TOM BROKAW: John Chancellor is here with his commentary now, and tonight he's discussing the President's controversial plan to help the Contras.

JOHN CHANCELLOR: In the big-money world of Washington, rarely has so little been opposed by so many. The President wants only 14 million dollars for the Contra rebels who are fighting the government of Nicaragua, but he has stirred up massive opposition to military aid, which includes Pope John Paul II, the American Catholic Church, the Presidents of Costa Rica and Colombia, a probable majority of the House of Representatives, and a large number of Senators.

A lot of people, including many who don't like the Nicaraguan government, think it is wrong to pay money for a nasty little war which our side cannot win. General Paul F. Gorman, who headed American forces in central America, has said that the Contras aren't strong enough to overthrow the Sandinistas in the foreseeable future.

There is talk of humanitarian aid instead of military aid. And that's how the compromise may come out. But free food and medicine might enable the Contras to keep on fighting. And that seems to be the nub of the problem.

Continuing aid to the Contras would mean continuing American involvement in a military campaign which has no chance of victory. That would mean more deaths and more costs. No one knows where it would end. No one can say precisely what it would

accomplish, other than keeping pressure on the Sandinistas, which they've been able to handle so far.

Senator David Durenberger, who chairs the Intelligence Committee, says that if we're really serious about controlling the Sandinistas, we should get together with the other Central American countries, under the OAS Charter and the Rio Treaty, and start some collective action: cut trade and diplomatic ties, consider a naval blockade.

Getting together with your neighbors when you feel threatened is a good rule. Supporting rebels who can't win is a bad one. And that's why aid to the Contras has been in such trouble.